

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
Worcester Public Hearing
Wednesday, November 15, 2006, 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
YWCA Central Massachusetts, 1 Salem Square, Worcester

Hearing Minutes

Attendees: Dianne Bruce, Julie Frechette, Marilee Kenny- Hunt, Renee Jardins, Carol Goodman Kaufman, Amy Martire, Amy Mosher, Shelly Rodman, Gail Smith, Grace Ross, John Wilkes

Elected Officials: Senator Hariette Chandler

Commissioners: Linda Cavaoli, Gloria Coney, Lianne Cook, Helen Corbett, Erika Ebbel, Donna Finneran, Marianne Fleckner, Cathy Greene, Liz Houlihan, Helen Jackson, Angela Menino, Susana Segat, Greer Swiston

Staff: Jill Ashton, Linda Brantley, Darlene Kelter

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Houlihan opened the meeting by welcoming the attendees and introducing the present members of the Commission. She then introduced Annie Houle from the Wage Project.

Annie Houle, the national director of the Wage Project, provided an overview of Evelyn Murphy's research and her book, "Getting Even: Why Women Don't Get Paid Like Men and What to Do About It." She shared examples from book as to the many and vary ways in women suffer discrimination, including gender discrimination, the mothering penalty, and sexual harassment.

Testimony

Chair Houlihan, opening the floor for testimony, noted that the Commission would listen to the remarks and report to legislators.

Gail Smith spent most her career working as an electronic engineering. She was began worker she was the only women employed in her job class. Ms. Smith reported working twice as hard for half the pay. When she would ask her boss about pay equity he would assure her that indeed she was being compensated equitably, however her co-workers admitted differently. Ms. Smith was particularly discouraged with the idea that a man has a family and responsibilities and thus should be paid more than a woman.

Carol Goodman Kaufman, president of the Western New England Region of Hadassah, presented written testimony, which has been included in the appendix of this report.

Marilee Kenny- Hunt, a member of AAUW, shared a personal story of growing up in a family where money was not discussed and the challenge of learning to value her work contribution even when it was consistently undervalued by employers.

John Wilkes, a member of the Worcester City Manager's Committee on the Status of Women and a professor at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, testified about his research on young women and their career aspirations. Twice as many women aspire to medical professions. Law and business schools also see more female candidates. Mr. Wilkes reported that SAT scores show young men just a bit ahead of the young women, however women are performing better academically and aiming higher than men at the beginning of their careers. The research begs the question as to why then are women not being paid equitably.

Commissioner Cavaoli asked if the aspirations findings were published. Mr. Wilkes reported that it has not yet been published but there are plans for the future. Commissioner Coney asked for more detail on the SAT scores. Mr. Wilkes responded that girls and boys test results are fairly equal in the early years, but that there appears to be a critical point between 8th and 10th grade when young women fall behind in standardized test scores.

Diane Bruce, who lives and works in Worcester, testified on the inequitable and at times inappropriate treatment that she and her female co-workers were made to endure. Women were not credited with their educational attainment while the men were. Females, even pregnant women, were made to wear pantyhose everyday; supervisors would check compliance by feeling their ankles. Christmas bonuses were presented to women (men were exempt) only after they had sat on the lap of a man dressed like Santa during the holiday party. Ms. Bruce noted that even though there were at least 12 –14 women who struggled with the same humiliation there was never a collective conversation instead they suffered through it as individuals.

Julie Frechette, a professor of women's studies at UMass Amherst, gave testimony on the discrimination she faced when she chose to begin a family. She noted that the basic impression is that when a woman becomes pregnant she will drop out. The result is that women are expected to work twice as hard to prove their commitment.

Senator Harriette Chandler, who arrived after the beginning of the hearing, provided an overview of her commitment to public service and the issue of pay equality. She has represented Worcester for x years first as a Representative and then as a Senator. Pay equity has been a long time and personal issue for her, and she recognizing the opportunity to effect change. She particularly admires the work of Evelyn Murphy, both during her tenure as the Lieutenant Governor and now after the release of "Getting Even." Of significant concern to the Senator are the disadvantages women suffer at the hands of the retirement and social securities systems.

Senator Chandler then noted that she had lived her life through the whole of the women's movement. She shared personal experiences working her way through an academic career, noting various obstacles placed in front of her.

Renee Jardins, an employee at the YWCA, testified that none of the women in her family make more than 40,000 and that her brother makes more than 100,000. She noted that she was raised to expect wage discrepancies between men and women as natural. She

argued that systematic sexism serves to influence women's choices, for example family responsibilities typically fall to women because men's higher earnings establish him as the primary earner and women as the primary car giver. She suggested that if employers were made to publish salaries wage inequities would diminish.

Shellie Rodman noted in her testimony that she has observed that women are less likely to change jobs, that they tend to be more loyal to their employers and that this impacts their earning potential. She noted that she had received raises in the past on the occasion when a new person was hired from outside the company. The employer would adjust the existing employee's salaries when it became apparent that an inequity existed.

Following the formal testimonies there was discussion amongst audience members.

Adjourn

Chair Houlihan thanked attendees for their participation and contributions.

Appendix

Written Testimony

Carol Goodman Kaufman

Thank you, and Senator Harriette Chandler, for offering me the opportunity to speak before this commission today. I am Carol Goodman Kaufman, President of the Western New England Region of Hadassah, which covers Vermont, Rhode Island, and a large portion of Massachusetts. With 300,000 members, Hadassah is the largest women's membership organization in the United States. Founded in 1912 as the outgrowth of a small women's study circle, Hadassah has maintained our core values of education and advocacy in our domestic agenda. Our efforts include health education on issues ranging from breast cancer to cardiac health to osteoporosis prevention; and, advocacy on issues ranging from organ donation to stem cell research to domestic violence prevention, and our topic today – pay equity.

According to the National Committee on Equity, women currently earn 77¢ for every \$1.00 earned by their male counterparts. Due to the wage gap it is estimated that the average 25 year-old woman will lose between \$700,000 and \$2 million over her working lifetime. All in all, working women's families lose \$200 billion of income to the wage gap each year.

In response to these disturbing statistics, Hadassah has taken the following actions, based on our tradition and history of learning, then doing:

1. We have joined the National Committee for Pay Equity's call for economic equality in all professions. By participating in annual Equal Pay Day Hadassah seeks to raise awareness about unfair pay practices.
2. Hadassah was a party to an amicus brief in the lawsuit Ledbetter vs. Goodyear Tire and Rubber, which addressed the question of whether and under what circumstances a plaintiff may bring an action under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, alleging illegal pay discrimination. The Civil Rights Act protects citizens against discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin – not gender.

3. Hadassah lobbies Congress and attends Congressional briefings. We urge stricter enforcement of pay equity laws and the passage of the “Fair Pay Act” and the “Paycheck Fairness Act” to reduce the wage gap and bring about real economic security for women.

Pay equity is not just a woman’s issue, but a family issue as well. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) has remarked that at the rate the wage gap is narrowing it will finally be eliminated by the time her young daughter is ready to retire in the year 2043. We must address this unjust wage disparity – for the sake of fairness, and for the American working family.

The federal “Paycheck Fairness Act” would put wage discrimination based on gender on the same legal footing as wage discrimination based on race or ethnicity. It would also strengthen current law to allow women to collect punitive as well as compensatory damages—instead of just back pay. The “Fair Pay Act” would amend the “Fair Labor Standards Act” to require employers to provide equal pay for work in jobs that are comparable in skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions. Unfortunately, the federal act has still not passed.

The Department of Labor conducted survey, entitled “Equal Pay Matters” It was based on an analysis of over 4,800 of the 100,000 companies that do business with the federal government and was requested by the Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee for FY 2000. The report found that the average woman working on U.S. government contract jobs is paid 72 cents for every dollar a man earns, 82 cents if she has the same position and 89 cents if she has equal tenure and experience at the same company.

Our legislators in Washington have not been successful in passing the Fair Pay Act as yet. Massachusetts has the chance to be a leader in showing the nation that, at the very least, our state and municipal workers, and employees of those companies that do business with the State, are compensated equitably for their contributions in the work place.

In summary, Hadassah believes that it is time to make pay equity the law once – and for all.

Thank you again for the opportunity to express our concerns.